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## THE AMBIVALENCE OF POWER: CHARISMATIC CHRISTIANITY AND OCCULT FORCES IN URBAN TANZANIA

### *Abstract*

In this article I explore parallels and dynamic interplays between charismatic Christianity and «traditional» understandings of mysterious power as related to an occult sphere in the city of Iringa in central Tanzania. I discuss how notions of power as constructive and necessary yet also dangerous and potentially destructive are adopted into and partly transformed by charismatic discourses on the realm of darkness and related ritual practices of empowerment, rupture and spiritual struggle. In the end I argue that the relationship between charismatic Christianity and traditional religion/ culture may better be grasped in terms of coevalness, intersections and ongoing mutual influence than temporalising difference.

Key words: charismatic Christianity, ritual, traditional African religion, continuity/discontinuity

### Introduction

One of the most noteworthy phenomena in the transformation of sub-Saharan African societies over the past thirty years has been the growth of charismatic Christian movements or churches. The term charismatic Christianity refers broadly to Pentecostal churches and Pentecostal-like revival groups within mainline churches that share an emphasis on personal salvation (being born again), the gifts (charismata) of the Holy Spirit, experiential forms of worship, and spiritual warfare. While historical roots can be traced back to the so called Azusa street revival in Los Angeles, USA, in 1906, it has been estimated that two thirds of the world's adherents now live outside of the west (Robbins 2004:117). According to the World Christian Encyclopedia there were 126 million Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians in Africa in 2000 (Meyer 2004:452).

The global spread of charismatic Christianity and the enthusiasm with which it is embraced and appropriated into various indigenous contexts have captured a great deal of scholarly attention. Well known themes in the anthropological study of globalisation, such as the relationship between the common and the particular, homogenisation versus

indigenising differentiation or the dialectics between flow and closure have shaped analysis in much of the existing literature (Cortén and Marshall-Frantani 2001; Robbins 2004). An area of particular interest for Africanists has been the somewhat paradoxical relationship between charismatic Christianity and traditional religion (Engelke 2004; Larkin and Meyer 2006; Meyer 1999, 2004). On the one hand born again Christians harshly reject traditional religious practice and non-Christian spirits as inventions of Satan. Notions of rupture and breaking with the past and the ways of the ancestors figure prominently in the rhetoric of conversion. On the other hand, it has been stressed that charismatic Christianity, through processes of diabolisation and the emphasis on spiritual warfare, in fact contribute to the preservation and renewed significance of traditional religion (Meyer 1999).

This paper is intended as a contribution to the current literature on the relations between charismatic Christianity and traditional African religious life worlds. Its particular focus lies in the interplay between charismatic Christianity and existing understandings of occult powers in the city of Iringa in central Tanzania. I discuss how notions of mystic power as necessary and constructive, yet also dangerous and potentially destructive are adopted into charismatic discourses on the realm of darkness and related ritual practices. While I take some pains in pointing out how charismatic Christians maintain certain propositional beliefs concerning spiritual dangers and the need of empowerment and protection, I also argue that notions of renewal and ritual practices of rupture are foundational to born again religiosity and identity. I further consider the ways in which born again Christians, through processes of diabolisation, not only preserve existing beliefs but also partake in processes of depersonalisation of witchcraft and other occult forces. Finally I argue that we might do well by moving beyond a simple continuity/discontinuity dualism and instead conceive of the relation between charismatic Christianity and traditional religion in terms of coevalness and ongoing mutual influence.

## Research and method

This article is based on a total of 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork. Iringa was originally chosen as a field site for my MA-thesis in 1998, partly for practical reasons as Danish Lutheran missionaries working in the area helped me establish contacts to local church authorities, and partly because of the strength of Protestant revivalism in the city. My fieldwork consisted of 150 interviews with born again Christians, numerous informal conversations and participant observation during church activities. Questions of parallels and continuity/discontinuity between charismatic Christianity and «traditional» beliefs and practices soon became central to my research, as I realised that most conversion narratives include accounts of witchcraft related problems followed by a period of navigation between different spiritual alternatives (traditional healers, ancestral worship, churches). Besides, born again Christians tend to present divine power as a very explicit alternative to the protective and constructive power of ancestors and traditional healers. When I returned to Iringa as a post graduate scholar in 2003, 2005, 2006 and 2007, I tried to explore such parallels by interviewing mainline Christians,

Muslims and traditional healers, mainly focusing on perceptions of spiritual dangers, protection and empowerment.

## Background

Though present in Tanzania since the early twentieth century, it was only in the 1970s and 1980s that Pentecostalism started to expand and become an influential actor on the religious scene. In response to this new competition a charismatic revival group soon emerged within the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the largest Protestant denomination in the country (Hasu 2006). Schisms have since occurred as the result of persistent tensions between revivalists and church authorities, and in 2001 a revival group called the New Life in Christ separated itself from the Lutheran Church in Iringa and started working as an independent ministry. The born again Christians that I refer to in this study all belong to the New Life in Christ or the Lutheran revival movement.

Charismatic Christianity appeals to a wide spectre of people. Iringa's ethnic mixture is reflected in charismatic groups, the majority of members belonging to the Wahehe, the Wabena and the Wakinga tribes. The occupations of born again Christians range from successful independent businessmen to housewives, unskilled workers with meagre salaries, and small scale commercial farmers. Yet a majority of members attempt in different ways to make a living in the service sector as vendors, hairdressers, tailors, independent photographers, and owners of small shops or stalls at city markets.

The growth of charismatic revivalism in Tanzania took place in a climate of political change. In the mid-1980s, economic hardship, resulting from a combination of factors (drought, the costly war with Uganda in the late 1970s, the oil crisis, a growing imbalance between import and export prices), and the all too evident inability of the state to secure the welfare of its citizens, led the government to officially abandon its *ujamaa* (African socialism) policy. *Ujamaa* was entrenched in the famous Arusha declaration in 1967 and characterised by state centralisation, nationalisation of major industries, import restrictions and the attempt to construct a sense of shared national citizenship over and above religious, racial and tribal differences. While the following implementation of an IMF-led structural adjustment programme resulted in decreased inflation and an increased GDP, such macro-economic changes were not necessarily experienced as a success story by ordinary citizens. Though some have benefited from liberalisation and increased access to foreign consumer goods, many have been faced with urban unemployment, increased poverty and significant reductions of real wages. As a consequence a growing number of Tanzanians have since the 1980s become self-employed in the informal economic sector (see Tripp 1997).

The relationship between political changes, commonly associated with neo-liberalism, and the growth of charismatic Christianity in Africa has been a subject of some scholarly debate. Whereas some scholars point to the de-politicizing aspects of charismatic Christianity, stressing that the emphasis on spiritual causality removes focus from structural issues (Brouwer et. al 1996), others have taken a more positive stance, arguing that this religion, while not concerned with formal political change, enables believers to

come to terms with neo-liberalism and limiting conditions by offering hope, self-worth, conceptual clarity, new networks of mutual support, and changed patterns of consumption (Maxwell 2005). Despite the different evaluations of the social impact of charismatic Christianity, these scholars and others do to a large extent share a view on religious revivalism in Africa as related to a vacuum that is left behind by the retreat of the state and by a declining faith in modernisation and official developmental narratives. In the case of Tanzania, John Campbell (1999: 122) explains a resurgence of ethnic and religious identities in terms of the failure of the national socialist project and a general crisis of legitimacy of elite politics. While an explicit discussion of the political impact of religious revivalist movements in the context of neo-liberalism lies beyond the scope of this essay, I will on the following pages argue that charismatic Christianity offers believers conceptual, discursive and not least ritual resources for orientation, self-transformation, and empowerment in a changing social world, while at the same time being rooted in existing (but not static) notions of spiritual causality and power.

### The importance of *nguvu* in everyday life

During my first fieldwork, I soon noticed how often the word *nguvu* appeared in sermons, testimonies, interviews and informal conversations. *Nguvu* can be translated as power, life force or strength. *Nguvu* may refer to physical strength that is acquired through rest and eating properly, but the term is often used to refer to a mysterious invisible power that influences the course of human life. According to the Tanzanian theologian Cosmas Haule (1969:30–33), Bantu people have a highly developed sense of an occult mysterious power (*nguvu ya ajabu*), which surrounds and envelops them, and which can be used for both good and evil purposes. Bantu people believe that this power is somehow inherent in them, but must be increased by God, ancestors or witch-doctors in order to resist adversary bad powers of evil beings. Indeed the most important task of ancestors is to preserve and strengthen this *nguvu* among the living.

As my own research proceeded, the continued fascination and concern with *nguvu* as a key to success and general well-being became clear to me. For many Tanzanians, good health and fertility as well as success in school, work, business and love are believed to depend upon access to *nguvu*. The need for *nguvu* was often explained to me in terms of safety and protection against the harmful *nguvu* of others, as witches and different spirits always threaten to sabotage the success of ordinary people. In the following I explore how such understandings of blessing and protecting *nguvu* are appropriated and reproduced within charismatic Christianity, partly through an elaborate discourse on the Devil and his many servants, and partly through ritual practice.

In charismatic Christianity *nguvu* has been conceptualised within a moral dualism. Thus, there are ultimately two sources of *nguvu*, God and Satan. Divine *nguvu* is available to all born again Christians, and while it is supposedly received once and for all at the moment of salvation, it must nevertheless be continuously reactivated and increased, particularly through frequent praying, Bible study, participation in fellowships and other ritual activities. As I will demonstrate below, divine *nguvu* is more than a soul-saving

power. While the promise of eternal life is appealing, divine *nguvu* is mostly conceived of in pragmatic terms as a matter of empowerment and protection in everyday life.

Whereas divine *nguvu* is pure and good, discourses on satanic *nguvu* and the realm of darkness are characterised by higher levels of complexity and inclusiveness, and different spiritualities are easily classified as servants of the Devil. One widely acknowledged source of *nguvu*, which born again Christians believe to be satanic, is ancestor worship. While born again Christians distinguish ancestral spirits from the demons that are fallen angels, the former are believed to be powerful spiritual beings that belong to Satan's team. Ancestral worship, practised by many mainline Christians and Muslims, is not regarded as harmless superstition, but perceived to be a dangerous practice that may result in curses. The charismatic understandings of fallen angels, commonly referred to as *majini*, are influenced by contact with coastal Islamic Kiswahili culture. The existence of *majini* (*jinn* in Arabic) is substantiated in several verses of the Qu'ran and as a general rule Tanzanian Sufi Muslims see such spirits as the creatures of God, though they also distinguish between good, protective and harmful *majini*. While born again Christians insist that all *majini* are satanic, charismatic demonologies are clearly informed by Islamic understandings of the *majini* as having different national and ethnic characteristics and hence constituting a spiritual world that parallels the human world (Giles 1997).

A closely related source of *nguvu*, is the *waganga* (healers). Despite calling themselves «traditional» healers (*waganga wa kienjeje*) the *waganga* have successfully adopted modern bureaucratic and marketing strategies. They are organized in a national association, use small identity cards, and sometimes advertise their services in newspapers and radios. Some of them use titles such as «professor» or «doctor», thereby stressing their position and status as healers in a modern world. A few *waganga* have stalls at the city markets where they sell different kinds of medicine, and others have posters outside their homes with a list of their specialities, maybe even giving a cell phone number.

People visit the *waganga* in cases of sickness and infertility, but also in search of success, in love, politics and business. Thus, the *waganga* provide vendors at markets or owners of shops with business medicine that supposedly attracts clients. In a similar way, politicians who wish to be elected or workers who want to impress their bosses may seek assistance from a *mganga* (singular of *waganga*), mostly in the form of a powder or a fluid medicine, which is poured on the face and the body. Sex, male potency, fertility and infidelity are some of the most important sources of income for the *waganga*. If a woman knows or fears that her husband is cheating on her a *mganga* can provide her with medicine in the form of small objects to be placed in the food she cooks or in the doorway of a house. Whenever the husband leaves, the *nguvu* of the medicine will cause him to forget about other women and miss his wife.

While the medicines of the *waganga* are believed to contain mysterious *nguvu*, it is widely recognized that it must originate from somewhere else. A majority of the 25 *waganga* I interviewed proudly told me that they were assisted by ancestral spirits, *majini*, or both, and that it would indeed be impossible to work as an *mganga* without such assistance. They all had some institutional affiliation with Catholicism or Islam. It

was especially the Muslim, but also a few Catholic, *waganga* who claimed to be keeping *majini*, whose division of labour follows national/ethnic stereotypes. Thus Chinese, Indian and Arabic *majini* are all used for business purposes, whereas British *majini* can help persons who have to present themselves in court.

A different, though according to born again Christians (and others), not really different, source of *nguvu* is witchcraft (*uchawi*). Most people in Iringa distinguish between the kind of witchcraft that is mainly used to obstruct the happiness and development of others, and the newer witchcraft of wealth, either used by witches themselves or by people who seek their assistance. The former is mostly, but not exclusively, associated with poor and poorly educated people, and often villagers and elders, who resent the well-being of others, whereas people from any social status could be suspected of using witchcraft of wealth. The latter is employed to attract clients to a business, to steal money from other people's pockets or purses, or to protect wealth that is acquired through corruption. Most people I talked to about these matters explained to me that witches must have spiritual assistance from ancestors, *majini*, or both. The *majini* must be fed with human flesh and blood, which is also believed to be the favourite food and drink of witches themselves. Envious witches are known to attack their victims by causing accidents, illness and temporary insanity, or by disturbing them at night, injecting them with fear and making them feel they are being strangled. While the witchcraft of wealth is not practiced with the aim of disturbing others, it is widely believed that wealth generated by use of witchcraft comes at a high price, such as the sacrifice of a human relative, who is either eaten by witches and their *majini* or kept as a kind of zombie spirit (*msukule*) that can be put to work in fields or shops.

Providing protection against witchcraft is another main task of the *waganga*. Anti-witchcraft medicine usually comes in the form of a powder that can be placed in the windows or doors of a house or it can be put directly into a person's blood through small wounds. The ability of the *waganga* to fight off witches is a source of status and power but also a cause of anxiety and suspicion by others, since it is widely believed that the *nguvu* that is needed to combat witchcraft must itself be a *nguvu* of witchcraft. The fact that many *waganga* claim to be assisted by *majini* and ancestral spirits, also known to be used by witches, contribute to their ambiguous status, even though the *waganga* themselves insist that their *majini* are beneficial and do not drink human blood but only require a little incense. In a study of the Maka people in south eastern Cameroon, Peter Geschiere (1997:95) argues that a close association between power and witchcraft betrays a deep distrust in any forms of power. Such distrust and ambiguity also characterise discourses on *nguvu*, which is perceived as constructive and necessary, yet also mysterious and potentially dangerous.

Though born again Christians do not hesitate to categorise all *waganga* as witches and thus servants of Satan, it would nevertheless be an oversimplification to state that they come to terms with the ambivalence of power by simply ascribing all good *nguvu* to God and all bad *nguvu* to the Devil. Certainly, the *nguvu* of God is good, and nothing bad will ever come from seeking divine empowerment. But born again Christians also recognize that the *nguvu* of witchcraft and the *waganga* can be used for constructive purposes. It is not uncommon for born again Christians to talk about nationally famous

*waganga* with a combination of fear and fascination, and the ability of the latter to identify and neutralise witches is widely acknowledged. And while born again Christians who run small businesses rely on divine *nguvu*, they recognise that satanic *nguvu* may be equally efficient and is somehow preferable to no *nguvu* at all. Charles, a born again Christian man who had a small second hand clothing shop gave me the following explanation:

You know, a large percentage of those who have a business use medicine. If you do not have Jesus, you must use the *nguvu* of an *mganga*, it is necessary. Without any kind of *nguvu* you cannot sell anything. If you do not have the *nguvu* of God, you need to use the *nguvu* of Satan.

However, born again Christians insist that success achieved through the use of medicine comes at a price. A person who is cured by an *mganga* may fall ill again because a door to demonic influence has been opened, and the medicine that prevents husbands from being unfaithful can have the side effect of making them lazy, apathetic and even impotent with their wives. Given the unclear relationship between the *waganga* and the powers of witchcraft, the use of business medicines is viewed with considerable ambiguity and suspicion by many people. For the same reason, very few people openly admit using business medicines, although everyone suspects others of doing so, and the *waganga* insist that they sell a lot of it. As Sanders, writing on the Inhanzu of Western Tanzania, notes, medicines are best used secretly, as one person's medicine may always be another person's witchcraft (Sanders 1999:126). For born again Christians, it makes little sense to try to distinguish the use of business medicines from the witchcraft of wealth, and they insist that excessive wealth acquired through the use of medicines requires human sacrifices. While it is fascinating and can be used for constructive purposes, satanic *nguvu*, much like witchcraft, is also dangerous and ultimately destructive to anyone who has access to it. In the following section the incorporation of witchcraft within the Christian realm of darkness will be explored further.

## Satanic *nguvu* and witchcraft

Though the *nguvu* of darkness ultimately derives from Satan, it is appropriated and put to use by different human and spiritual agents. Birgit Meyer has demonstrated how Pentecostalism in Ghana through processes of diabolisation simultaneously rejects and preserves non-Christian occult worlds. Her observation that the Devil seems to have more influence on people's interest in their daily lives than God (Meyer 1999:214) is equally valid in the case of born again Christians in Iringa. Witches, *waganga*, ancestral spirits and *majini* are classified as satanic servants who occasionally travel to Hell to receive *nguvu* and instructions from their master, but their ontological status as powerful and dangerous beings that interfere in everyday affairs is not questioned.

In a study of a rural Wabena community in southern Tanzania, Flemming Hansen (2004) argues that Lutheran Christianity is mainly able to address people's concerns with the hereafter, but is largely irrelevant in everyday life. Traditional healers and

ancestors are perceived as far more relevant and efficient when it comes to concerns of the here and now, such as spirit possession, sorcery and curses. I think that such observations are quite helpful in terms of understanding important differences between mainline and charismatic Christianity and thus of accounting for the growth and success of the latter in Sub-Saharan Africa. For born again Christians in Iringa, ancestral worship and traditional healing are strictly forbidden. But the point I wish to establish is that charismatic Christianity, through discourses on an inclusive realm of darkness, through pragmatic understandings of divine *nguvu*, and not least through ritual practices of rupture, empowerment and protection (see below) *is* indeed able to address many everyday spiritual and social concerns such as witchcraft, spirits and the need of some kind of *nguvu* in order to succeed in different areas of life.

Though Satan is responsible for all evil, born again Christians do not always reach this ultimate layer in their interpretations and explanations of unfortunate events. On one occasion I assisted a fellowship (a charismatic meeting), where a *jini* (singular of *majini*) was exorcised from a young woman. When I asked another participant about this woman he told me, that her husband's jealous mistress had bewitched her by sending her a *jini*. When I asked for more details, he added that the *jini* was, of course, an agent of Satan. Had the insisting anthropologist in this case not explicitly asked for more and more details and layers, the story told would only have been about witchcraft and *majini* and without any direct references to Satan.

However, the inclusiveness of the realm of darkness does not mean that existing occult worlds are simply left intact. Despite the fascination with the *nguvu* of witchcraft and the *waganga*, and the recognition that such *nguvu* can be used constructively, born again Christians do have very clear notions of good and evil *nguvu*. Besides, existing cosmologies do lose some of their complexity by being subsumed within the realm of darkness (though new complexity is also added). Whereas the *waganga* take great pains at distinguishing themselves from witches, the distinction has lost much of its importance for born again Christians, who in everyday language often refer to the *waganga* as witches without major concerns for categorical distinctions. Born again Christians differentiate between different kinds of *majini*, and between *majini* and ancestral spirits. But while such distinctions are important in terms of explaining transformations of witchcraft (see below) they rarely have much practical relevance, as all such spirits are seen as satanic agents that can possess persons (though ancestral spirits can only possess their living relatives whereas *majini* can possess everyone) and must be expelled. Praying for deliverance does not necessarily imply any attempt to define which kind of spirit is at work.

Besides, Satan is a very important sacred other in the life world of born again Christians, even if he is not always mentioned in stories about human misfortune ascribed to spiritual forces. Consider the following excerpt from an interview with Mama Deo, a born again woman in her early thirties who sold vegetables at a small stall at a local market:



ML: So you said that before you were saved, the witches disturbed you. Exactly what did they do?

MM: For instance sickness, they disturbed me a lot, there was always sickness in my home. It was Satan for sure, but now there is no sickness, God protects us.

ML: Did the witches disturb you in any other way?

MM: Many times I had problems with my business. People did not buy anything from me. It was because Satan had had passed by my stall and stopped the customers

ML: Do you think it was a witch?

MM: Yes, it was Satan, for sure it was Satan, but now that I am saved, I pray to God and now I am doing better with my business.

Earlier in the interview Mama Deo had told me that her neighbour was a witch who had caused different problems for her and her family. But here she prefers to go directly to the real source, namely Satan himself. When I asked her if she thought a witch had sabotaged her business, she replied, «yes, it was Satan» (rather than: «no, it was Satan»). This answer indicates a perception of witchcraft as inseparable from Satan, but Mama Deo also seems to be more concerned with the latter than with a specific human witch. After salvation she never bothered to confront her neighbour again though she was still convinced that he had bewitched her family. Such lack of concern with specific witches is not unusual for born again Christians. In December 2005 Mama Esta, a born again woman in her forties told me that her daughter had recently had a miscarriage which had been caused by a witch. When I asked her if she and her relatives had tried to identify the responsible witch she claimed that they had not, as she saw herself engaged in an overall spiritual struggle, mainly fought through praying, against the forces of darkness, rather than against some particular witch.

In the anthropological literature, witchcraft suspicions and accusations are often conceived of as the dark side of kinship, pointing to a fundamental tension in African societies between individualism and ideals of reciprocity and generosity within extended families (Geschiere 1997). Such explanations do to a large extent ring true in the case of witchcraft beliefs in Iringa. The rumours that relate the generation of wealth to witchcraft and sacrifices of relatives can be seen as articulations of a perceived tension between excessive individual accumulation and kinship solidarity. Besides, the witches who are motivated by envy are known to attack their own relatives. I heard quite a few stories of bright students in primary and secondary school, who were bewitched by resentful relatives and mostly their (both maternal and paternal) aunts, who were envious because their own children (the cousins of the victim) were less successful in school.

However, models of witchcraft attribution are dynamic, adaptive, and change over time. Though misfortune is still often ascribed to witchcraft attacks of envious family members, several of my (born again and other) informants also explained to me that a difference between modern and traditional witchcraft, and to some extent between contemporary urban and rural witchcraft, is that modern witches are able to attack and even eat different people and not just their relatives. More than half of the actual witchcraft accusations and suspicions I heard of were directed at unrelated neighbours. And like Mama Esta several born again Christians, who had felt that witches were trying to sabotage their salvation and social, material blessings not only claimed to be ignorant of the identity of the witches but also found it unnecessary to investigate the matter. The major

concern of urban born again Christians is to find some protection against the *nguvu* of darkness, whereas identification and persecution of specific witches is less important.

Understandings of witchcraft as a destructive force that has become more anonymous are not a charismatic Christian peculiarity but are shared by many people in Iringa and elsewhere in Africa and can, in part, be related to changing patterns of sociality and exchange. Pascal Boyer, who has done research among the Fang people in Cameroon, explains the increasing anonymity of witchcraft in Africa in terms of urbanisation and transition to less personal spheres of exchange:

In traditional beliefs the witches were relatives or in-laws; one had to identify them to solve the problem. In more modern developments the witches are anonymous, and rituals offer a general protection against their attacks. The traditional version was clearly inspired by village-based forms of exchange, where people co-operated mainly with kin or kith and knew them personally. The modern version follows a general transition to market economies and constant influx of people into the cities, changing the format of social exchange. In both contexts the way you exchange directs the way you construe the arch-cheats. (Boyer 2001:228)

Similarly, several people in Iringa explained to me that it is easier to hide and practice witchcraft secretly in a larger city. In the villages, on the other hand, it will almost always be known if someone is a witch. But while the movement of witchcraft beyond the confines of kinship and towards greater levels of anonymity can be ascribed to general societal transformations, it is also facilitated by associations with less personal, world religious spiritual forces. According to several of my informants, born again Christians and others, the alliance between witches and the *majini* is a more or less recent development. Unlike ancestral spirits, *majini* do not have any family relationship to their human hosts, and they may even be bought and sold. In older anthropological literature on the Wahehe and the Wabena tribes there is no mention of *majini* (e.g. Culwick and Culwick 1935; Redmayne 1964), and in Iringa several older people explained to me how witches in the old times, that is 30–40 years ago, only worked with harmful medicines and ancestral spirits. Others believed that *majini* had always been available to local witches, but that their number had increased considerably within recent years. A few of the *majini*-keeping *waganga*, I spoke to, told me, that their fathers and grandfathers had also been *waganga*, but did not keep *majini*. It is not uncommon to refer to ancestral spirits and *majini* as traditional and modern demons/spirits (*mapepo ya kienjeje* and *mapepo ya kisasa*), and the ability of contemporary witches to attack different people, and not just their own relatives, is sometimes ascribed to the assistance of *majini*. In the same way the incorporation of witchcraft within a Christian metanarrative of a cosmic struggle between God and Satan also contributes to the movement of the occult towards a less personalised and more general level. As discourses on occult forces address concerns with anonymity, social insecurity and different kinds of hostility and rivalry between non-kin folk in urban environments, and as concerns with concrete social tensions are to some extent replaced by concerns with general safety and protection, the ultimate and universal source of the *nguvu* of witchcraft, the Christian Devil, is sometimes more important than specific witches.

## Offensive and defensive *nguvu*

*Nguvu* can be used for both aggressive and defensive purposes. Thus a main purpose of acquiring *nguvu* is to be protected against the *nguvu* of others. As mentioned the *waganga* do not just help people succeeding in business and love but also protect them against witchcraft. When a *mganga* empowers a stall at a market this is also a way of cleansing it of any bad *nguvu* that keeps clients away. *Waganga* are also involved in soccer matches, where they help local teams by controlling the wind and disturbing the sight of the opposite team's goal keeper and, not least, by neutralising the *nguvu* of the *mganga* who is helping the opposite team.

The understanding of *nguvu* as protective and defensive is reproduced within charismatic Christianity. When asked about the main benefits of salvation, most informants said that divine *nguvu* now kept them safe from the *nguvu* of darkness. Similarly to the ways the anti-witchcraft medicines of an *mganga* should be physically placed or poured out in shops, stalls and private homes, several born again Christians explained to me how they would walk around in their shops, stalls, and homes and in their own words *kuweka maombi* or *kuweka damu ya Yesu*, which literally means «place praying» or «place the blood of Jesus» in order to keep evil *nguvu* away. And just like the protective divine *nguvu* must be reactivated through daily prayer, the protective medicines of the *waganga* tend to expire after some time and have to be re-purchased.

This understanding of divine *nguvu* as defensive and protective is illustrated in the following excerpt from an interview with a Lutheran church elder, Mtwewe.

Before I was saved I was a church elder but my family got many problems. I don't know about Denmark, but here there are many witches and they bothered me a lot. Their *majini* came at night and disturbed me, I felt like I was being strangled. I was afraid and could not sleep. I was a church elder, I went to Sunday services but afterwards I would go out and drink a lot of beer. Before, I would visit my *mganga* when I fell sick. He said that he would send his *majini* to Zanzibar to get *nguvu* to cure me. I paid the *mganga* a lot of money, and I thought, «now I will sleep peacefully», but it did not help, the witch still came at night. I wanted to fight, but I could not see my opponent. So I went to see the *mganga* again, and he said that he would now send his *majini* to Kenya to get *nguvu*. But again I was not helped. But then one day, a man said to me, «in Jesus, there is *nguvu*, in Jesus there is protection and healing, if Jesus saves you, you will no longer be disturbed by the *nguvu* of Satan». It was at a meeting. So I decided to ask Jesus to save me. Now I sleep peacefully, if my children get sick I no longer give them the medicine of the *mganga*, instead I say, «in the name of Jesus, *majini* of sickness, leave», and when the *majini* hear the name of Jesus, they leave. My wife and children were saved afterwards, and now we all have an internal happiness. The witches have never bothered us again. Now I preach the word of God and I pray for the sick and cure them or if people have problems with *majini*, I pray for them. Now I have more *nguvu* to work as a church elder.

This testimony is by no means atypical. Like Mtwewe several other born again Christians told me how their decision to be saved was motivated by witchcraft related troubles. In search of protective *nguvu* they first consulted one or several *waganga*, but to no avail. They finally received help through a Pentecostal or charismatic ministry. Mtwewe's testimony illustrates a religious/ medical pluralism, in which different strat-

egies for dealing with spiritual problems are available. Furthermore, it is notable how particularly strong *nguvu* is related to external, non-local forces, as the *mganga* had to send his demons as far as Zanzibar and Kenya in order to find the necessary *nguvu*.

Born again Christians frequently emphasise the need for renewed divine *nguvu* as protection against spiritual dangers. Several informants explained to me that they always pray for protective divine *nguvu* whenever they travel by bus, so that Satan and his demons and witches will not cause accidents, or before going to the city market, where spiritual forces are believed to be at work. I was also told that items sold at the city markets, may be possessed by *majini*, and whenever purchasing an item one should always whisper «in the name of Jesus, get out», in order to cleanse it. With a constant spiritual warfare intervening in human affairs, even born again Christians are not permanently safe but are always potential victims of minor demonic attacks, which is why continuous prayer for protective *nguvu* is necessary. Divine *nguvu* is mostly conceived of in pragmatic terms as a matter of security, immunity and empowerment in everyday life and only secondarily as a ticket to heaven.

Born again Christians commonly describe personal salvation as a movement from the realm of darkness to the realm of God. The decision to reject Satan and receive Christ as a saviour is, not surprisingly, perceived and narratively articulated as a defining point of rupture in their lives. Yet, a close look at their ritual and everyday practice indicates that processes of distancing oneself from one's past, the Devil and his demons, and of moving closer to God and his protective *nguvu*, are not confined to specific moments of conversion or the subsequent spiritual baptism, but are relived in daily spiritual struggles. Rupture, in other words, is an ongoing and essentially incomplete life project. This point has also been made by Robbins (2004:128) who notes how Pentecostalism/charismatic Christianity tends to ritualise discontinuity in different post conversion rituals of rupture such as deliverance, healing and spiritual in filling, where disjunction is emphasized. I will now turn to these forms of ritual activity.

## Ritual empowerment

In the present section I intend to demonstrate how a focus on ritual processes, a topic that is somehow neglected in much of the existing literature on African charismatic Christianity (but see Meyer 1999) can improve our understanding of some of the themes addressed so far, namely divine empowerment, protection, spiritual warfare and rupture. In charismatic ritual, I argue, diabolic attacks and divine *nguvu* become aspects of embodied action, through which empowered born again subjects are constituted.

Scholars have for some time argued for the need to revisit classic models of ritual as formally prescribed practice with little scope for the spontaneous expression of emotions or as representative behaviour, expressing prior belief systems. A more recent trend within anthropology has been to conceive of ritual as a contested arena of creative social action through which identities are constructed and negotiated (Hughes-Freeland and Crain 1998). Jean and John Comaroff (1993:xvi) plead for a focus on ritual as an arena

through which the malcontents of modernity can be domesticated, and Africans can empower themselves, and gain some sense of control over a social world that is perceived as rapidly changing. They further propose a broad definition of ritual that should not be confined to formally prescribed practice within highly institutionalised contexts, but should embrace mundane meaningful practice, which is often meant to transform and not just reproduce the environment in which it occurs. This definition of ritual seems particularly relevant in the case of born again Christians who tend to bring ritualized practices into different domains of everyday life, e.g. by conducting quiet deliverances of buses and purchased items.

It is mainly through ritual activities such as fellowships involving mutual focus, bodily co-presence and emotional arousal that charismatic communities are bound together and shared religious realities are created. The New Life in Christ and the Lutheran revival group both hold fellowships each Sunday in the afternoon and on at least two weekdays. Besides, they organise open-air revival meetings several times a year. These meetings usually attract large numbers of people, though not all of them find the religious content appealing or persuasive. Open-air meetings can be seen as a kind of public entertainment with music and dance, and while members of the audience may not agree with the message, the enthusiastic preaching is usually anything but boring.

A typical fellowship or open-air meeting consists of three phases. During the first 30–60 minutes the participants sing and dance as more people turn up. In open-air meetings a band usually plays on a stage while people dance around in front. In fellowships participants take turns to come up front and lead the singing while the remaining participants dance on the spot or walk around the church. Praying interrupts the dancing and singing. In fellowships participants pray loudly, and while some of them kneel, others stand or walk around and move their arms. These prayers seem quite dramatic to outsiders (and born again Christians are sometimes referred to by others as those who make noise, *wanaopiga kilele*). At open-air meetings where new potential converts may find loud praise unusual, a preacher usually gives a guiding prayer by a microphone on behalf of everyone present, whereas the other participants only pray silently.

The second phase is the sermon, which may last between 20 and 90 minutes. Any saved person can in principle preach, and women are often given the honour. The style is dramatic, and preachers commonly alter their voice while walking around on the stage (during open-air meetings) or in the church, hence appearing as living embodiments of the divine *nguvu* that they speak of. Common themes are satanic and demonic dangers and the ways salvation, *nguvu*, and protection can be found in Jesus. General explanations are supplemented with anecdotes about divine and satanic interference in everyday life. Moral lessons and warnings against sinning are also frequently given. At open-air meetings the participants are repeatedly advised not to visit *waganga*.

The last phase of meetings and fellowships consists of singing, praying and healing. In fellowships, afflicted participants gather in front of the pulpit where others pray for them. In open-air meetings, all participants are asked to gather in front of the stage where the preacher and a few others will pray for them, but attention is particularly directed at those who have made the decision to receive Jesus as their personal saviour. Since it is believed that demonic forces haunt all non-saved persons, praying for new converts is

quite similar to deliverance. In both cases, divine *nguvu* must be activated in order to remove all evil *nguvu*.

The final prayers in fellowships are loud and intense. The participants start by singing a slow song while making oscillatory movements with their arms and upper bodies, resulting in a gradual loss of peripheral awareness (Luhrmann 2004:523). The atmosphere created through such bodily and rhythmic engagement in worship, culminating when participants start praying loudly, has the qualities of a spontaneous *communitas*, defined by Victor Turner as «a feeling of endless power ... a mutual understanding on the existential level» (Turner 1982:47–48.) When someone speaks or prays loudly during meetings, it is said that he or she speaks or prays with *nguvu* (*anasema/ anaomba kwa nguvu*). Certainly, all informants I talked to about these issues agreed that the Holy Spirit is equally present when someone speaks or prays quietly. But the powerful utterance of words is an important and persuasive index of divine *nguvu* within and among speakers. Besides, as Csordas notes, the noise produced by a loudly praying collectivity may itself contribute to sensations of divine presence, as it appears to have a life of its own as a «Durkheimian occurrence, in which the reality of the collectivity becomes more vivid than the reality of its individual believer». He further suggests that loud praise should mainly be seen as a technique of the body and that «the effect of loud praise has its locus in the physical engagement of the body in the act of worship» (Csordas 1997:110). Singing, dancing and loud praise are ritual practices that engage the body and usher participants into the (perceived) presence of God.

Fellowships and open-air meetings are also the main arenas of spiritual warfare. Though witches may try sabotage such events by demonising participants so that they are unable to concentrate, born again Christians agree that witches fear ritual activities and prefer to stay away on account of the high concentration of divine *nguvu*. During collective praying participants not only ask God for blessings, but also demand of Satan and his servants that they leave them and others alone. Such demands are often made in semi-aggressive ways with raised voices, dramatic gesticulation, the moving of arms and pointing of forefingers. However, the most dramatic confrontation between satanic and divine *nguvu* occurs during deliverance. Expulsion of *majini* and ancestral spirits mostly takes place at the end of fellowships/ meetings, but may occur earlier, if a person almost always a woman, shows symptoms of possession such as sudden screaming, crying and shaking. It is believed that such reactions occur because the presence of the divine *nguvu* makes the spirits feel uncomfortable. The struggle between divine and satanic *nguvu* sometimes becomes physical when the possessed resists and has to be held down forcibly during praying. After some minutes of praying the possessed will calm down, and it is believed that the spirit has left her. The victory may only be partial at this point. If someone is possessed by several spirits some of them may remain, and further praying will be required at a later point, but at least an important battle has been won. Fellowships and open-air meetings end with a quiet song, and finally one person says a closing prayer on behalf of all participants. After loud individual praying and at times dramatic spiritual struggles, the encompassing control and peace of God and the ritual community must be demonstrated and felt.

What takes place in ritual, and most saliently during deliverance, is more than a symbolic rejection of Satan or a simple statement, as when participants in services in the Danish Lutheran Church say: «I forsake the Devil and all his deeds». During fellowships born again Christians become participators in an actual struggle between satanic and divine *nguvu*, the latter being activated by them selves and working through their bodies. According to Catherine Bell, ritual practice produces ritual agents with socially informed bodies with a sense of ritual or a certain practical knowledge. This knowledge is «not an inflexible set of assumptions, beliefs or body postures; rather it is the ability to deploy, play, and manipulate basic schemes in ways that appropriate and condition experience effectively. It is a mastery that experiences itself as relatively empowered, not as conditioned or moulded» (Bell 1992:221). In fellowships, ritual agents with certain embodied sensibilities or dispositions for experiencing divine *nguvu* are produced. Such ritual dispositions are not taken off as a piece of clothing at the end of a fellowship, but blend into the sphere of everyday life (Csordas 1997:198–99) where born again Christians continuously find themselves in need of divine *nguvu* in order to fight off Satan and his servants, e.g. at night in their homes, in buses, at markets, while doing business or by resisting temptations.

## Conclusion

For decades questions of continuity and discontinuity between African traditional religion and Christianity have concerned scholars from a wide a range of disciplines. In the case of Tanzanian charismatic Christianity, I hope to have demonstrated that such questions are too complex to be addressed in terms of a simple either/or dualism. On the one hand born again Christians reproduce basic ontological assumptions concerning spiritual causality as well as understandings of mysterious power as necessary and dangerous, fascinating and frightening, offensive and defensive. Yet I have also argued that charismatic Christianity, by simultaneously preserving and diabolising other spirit worlds contributes to an increasing depersonalisation and anonymisation of the occult, a process that can also in part be related to changing patterns of sociality and exchange in urban Africa. Besides, as Engelke (2004:106) reminds us, African religions are not as bounded as they are sometimes portrayed to be. Many of the occult forces that born again Christians classify as satanic, such as the *majini*, the witchcraft of wealth, and the zombie spirits, are themselves perceived to be of rather recent origin and can hardly be called «traditional» (though we might continue to call them that in lack of a better term). And despite referring to them selves as «traditional» the *waganga* take great pains in asserting and demonstrating that they keep up with urban modernity. Thus the relationship between Christianity and African beliefs and practices may better be grasped in terms of coevalness, intersections and ongoing mutual influence than temporalising difference (see Meyer 2004). More than simply reproducing or breaking away from ancient and static traditional belief systems, born again Christians partake in a continuous discursive and ritual unfolding of cultural religious life worlds. In the

process they are able to empower themselves and gain some sense of control in a rapidly changing social world.

While I have emphasised continuity in terms of concerns with occult forces, and of pragmatic and defensive understandings of power, we have also seen how a sense of empowerment is mainly achieved through practices of rupture. Such rupture, I argue, is ongoing and essentially incomplete, as protective divine *nguvu* must be reactivated on a daily basis. Yet, experiences of personal transformation and empowerment as intrinsically related to spiritual struggle, moving forward and distancing oneself from the occult forces that are believed to impede individual and societal development are foundational to born again Christian religiosity and identity, and must be taken seriously. The sense of control in a changing social world should foremost be ascribed to the self perceptions of born again Christians as renewed, empowered, holy and safe children of God.

In a recent publication Robbins distinguishes between two senses of the word «believe». To «believe in» something implies trusting it and committing one self to act in a certain way towards it, whereas «believe that» is usually applied to propositional statements like «I believe that God exists» (Robbins 2007:14). According to Robbins anthropologists studying situations of mixed belief tend to assume that «belief that» statements are the most important part of a culture. «Belief that» models of religion lend themselves to continuity thinking, as anthropologists often discover that recent Christian converts maintain many old propositional beliefs. Robbins (2007:15) suggests that paying more attention to «belief in» notions may be more useful in terms of identifying what people are up to culturally, and in analyzing discontinuity in places where old elements remain. Deciding whether or not a given culture can be looked on as Christian is not, he argues, a matter of weighing up Christian and non-Christian ideas but rather of considering which values are organizing the relations between ideas (2007:16). Born again Christians in Iringa believe *that* they live in a world of many dangerous spiritual beings (witches, zombies, ancestral spirits, *majini*) and *that* some kind of extraordinary protection and empowerment is necessary. There is little or no Biblical basis for many of these beliefs which are shared by Christians and non-Christians alike. Yet, the ways in which born again Christians deal with perceived spiritual dangers and constitute themselves as empowered, renewed subjects are clearly and mainly informed by belief, trust and confidence *in* the salvational and transformative power of Christian worship.

Finally, the analysis presented in this paper suggest that understandings of transformative power as related to an invisible world have not been eliminated by technological progress and modernist, democratic ideologies, where power supposedly derives from the people. This, however, is not to say that Africans have simply failed to modernise and that charismatic Christianity holds part of the blame for their entrapment within tradition. In fact, the upsurge of charismatic Christianity, and the persistence and innovation of discourses on witchcraft and other occult forces in sub Saharan Africa, have within recent years inspired a number scholars to revisit conventional modernist narratives and explore local experiences of modernity, or multiple modernities, as ambiguous, contradictory and very much enchanted (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Geschiere 1997; Meyer 1999, 2004). In the case of charismatic Christianity, the continued concern with spiritual struggle after salvation indicates that modernity and development for most people remain



aspirations rather than achieved conditions (Maxwell 2005:29). As Larkin and Meyer (2006:287) note, Pentecostal-charismatic churches in Africa do not simply lead people into modernity, but also offer a place to think about its failures. Modernity is not a unilinear evolutionary process of enlightenment and progress for the benefit of all people. Rather, it is filled with global and local contradictions, desires and anxieties, passions and social costs, gaps between aspirations and actual circumstances, and new inequalities and mechanisms of exclusion. More often than not these are far from transparent and cannot be adequately grasped in terms of Cartesian rationalism and empiricism (Nyamjoh 2001:36). Perceptions of the ambivalence of power, addressed in new and meaningful ways within charismatic Christian communities, are not a symptom of African backwardness but an integral part of modernity as it is experienced by local African actors.

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